



SAFETY ALERT 03-00

**Seventeenth Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
Box 25517
Juneau, Alaska 99802**

CALL FOR A FREE DOCKSIDE EXAM

MSO Anchorage	271-6725	MSD Sitka	966-5454
MSO Valdez	835-7223	MSD Ketchikan	225-4496
MSO Juneau	463-244	MSD Kodiak	486-5918
MSD Dutch Harbor	581-3466	MSD Kenai	283-3292

FIRE ON FISHING VESSEL, CREW AIRLIFTED OFF CAPE LAZAREF UNIMAK ISLAND, ALASKA

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties in support of “Ready for Sea – Alaska”.

Incident: A 154-ft crab boat suffered an apparent stack fire that spread and engulfed the pilothouse on February 11. The crew attempted to fight the fire with fire extinguishers, water buckets, the vessel’s fire hoses and by releasing the fixed fire extinguishing system located in the engine room. Despite these efforts, the fire continued to spread resulting in the vessel temporarily losing propulsion as well as a means to provide water for the fire hoses. The crew was able to send out a MAYDAY and remove survival gear from the bridge before the fire spread to the pilothouse. Shortly thereafter, the flames and intense heat destroyed all means of communication that prevented the crew from radioing updates of their situation to the Coast Guard. A nearby fishing vessel attempted to take the vessel in tow. At the time the crew abandoned the burning bridge, the vessel’s engines were in gear, but it had lost propulsion. The vessel regained propulsion, causing the vessel to run in circles complicating the assist vessel’s efforts to take it in tow. When all attempts failed, the assist vessel remained nearby the burning vessel until a Coast Guard helicopter airlifted the 5 man crew and dog, and transported them to Cold Bay for medical treatment. All were released in good condition. The vessel drifted onto shore and went hard aground on a sandy beach. Salvors plan on removing the pollution threat presented by the 12,000 gallons of fuel oil and refloating the vessel when weather permits.

Lessons Learned: While the cause of the casualty is unknown, there are several lessons learned.

1. Crew training in emergency situations is critical. Conducting drills prepare crewmembers for emergency situations and increase their chance of survival.
2. Properly maintained fire extinguishers, fire buckets, fire axes, fire mains and hoses, as well as a fixed fire extinguishing system gave the crew a fighting chance to put out the fire and minimize the fire damage. Their ability to contain the fire also provided time to call for help and stay on the vessel until other vessels and the CG arrived on scene.
3. Communications were timely and clear until the fire engulfed the pilot house and all communications were lost. Carriage of handheld VHF’s and/or a satellite phone provide a critical backup to primary communications.
4. Stack spaces should be regularly inspected for carbon buildup and worn out or damaged exhaust conduits. Flammable materials should not be stored in or around the stack spaces.
5. Repositioning of safety equipment from the path of a fire ensures they are accessible and useable if and when the situation deteriorates.
6. The vessel did not have a current CG dockside exam. These free exams, performed at the dock, help identify safety deficiencies that can lead to loss of vessels and/or their crew.